Chapter 7
Middle English

The Middle English period was a time of great changes in the English language. These changes affected the grammar of the language as well as the vocabulary. In grammar this meant the gradual loss of inflections, and in vocabulary, this resulted in the disappearance of many Old English words and the acquistition of thousands of words from French and Latin.

1. Middle English Dialects;

The principal Middle English dialects correspond in a general way to the four chief dialects of Old English. The Kentish dialect of Old English became Kentish Middle English. The area which is called Southern occupies nearly the same territory as the West Saxon dialect of Old English. Northern Middle English is also a development of Northern (or Northumbrian) Old English. Mercian Old English, the dialect of Central England, is generally called Midland for the Middle English period. This Midland dialect is usually divided into two subareas, East and West Midland.

It is only towards the end of the 14th century that we see the language of London - the language of the court, and of great poets, like Chaucer - assume throughout Britain the form of a common written and literary standard language. Previously, only dialects existed, local speech forms that changed from one to the next. This may help to explain what Chaucer has called "the

Northern

West   East

M i d l a n d

Kentish

Southern

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great diversity of English". It is this literary standard language that is taken as the basis for the present analysis.

2. Middle English Spelling:

Changes in pronunciation are usually reflected in the writing system only after the lapse of some time. So, the changes in the sound system of English from Old English to the Middle English period affected the writing system only in the later stages:

The following table shows the Old English spellings that disappeared in Middle English:

Old English	Middle English
æ [æ]	a
y [y]	u,i
đ [d]	đ
Ø [Ø]	th
w [w]	u,w

The first letter was a symbol for the old English vowel [æ], and it was replaced in the Middle English period by the letter [a].

The second letter represented the high front rounded vowel [y] in Old English words like đynne and fyr, and these were found in Middle English texts with either the letter u (usually under the influence of the French writing system) or the letter i.

The sound [d], which was represented in the writing system of Old English by the letter đ was represented in Middle English by Ø or by đ. In late Middle English both đ and Ø disappeared and were replaced by th.

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[w] disappeared from Middle English texts, and was first replaced by u in the earlier half of the Middle English period (roughly up to 1250). In later manuscripts the sound [w] was usually represented by the letter w.

The symbol g was used in some English manuscripts of this period to represent sometimes the sound [y], and sometimes the sound [g].

The French Influence:

From the time of the Norman Conquest in 1066 to about the middle of the fourteenth century, French was the language of the upper classes in Britain. Many French words were borrowed into English, and these kept their spellings when they were used in writing.

Some of the changes that occurred as a result of the influence of the French writing system are:

1. ou instead of $\bar{u}$:

The word hūs, "house" had this splling in Old English and in early Middle English. But in Late Middle English and under the French influence it came to be written hous.

2. u instead of y:

O.E. fyr "fire" was written fur and fuir in Middle English. In the South of England it was written with v instead of f; vur, and vuir.

3. ie instead of $\bar{e}$:

The Old English verb spedan "to speed" appears in late Middle English texts as spiede (n.).

4. v instead of f:

The Old English word līf "life" was written lieve in Middle English.

5. ch instead of c:

O.E. cidan "to blame" was written in Middle English chide (n.)

6. qu instead of cw:

The word cwēn "queen" in Old English was spelt quen and queen in Middle English.

3. Phonology:

The Consonants:

Middle English is now being studied from manuscripts, records, and documents, and discussion of the exact nature of its sound system presents more difficulties than would be encountered when dealing with a language spoken today like Modern English. What conclusions are drawn in this respect should never be looked upon as final.

The following table presents the consonant phonemes of the London dialect of Middle English:

	Bi-labial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveo-lar	Alveo-palatal	Velar	Glot-tal
Stops	p			t		k	
	b			d		g	
Affricates					tš		
					dž		
Fricatives		f	Ø	s		x	h
		v	đ	z	š		
Nasals	m			n		ŋ	
Lateral				l			
Trill				r			
Semi-vowels					y	w	

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Compared with Old English consonants, the consonants of Middle English present these differences:

1. The vocied velar fricative /g/ (ᵹ) disappeared during the Middle English period, although the voiceless counterpart was still there. The voiceless velar fricative / x / (ᵹ) was a significant sound of Middle English till after Chaucer's time.

2. Three new fricative consonants developed during the Middle English period:

/v/ Was an allophone of / f / in Old English, but was a separate phoneme in Middle English.

/d/ became an indepdent significant sound (a phoneme) in Middle English and was no longer a membrer of the / Ø / phoneme as had been the case in Old English,

/z/ was also a separate phoneme in Middle English, and not an allophone of the Old English consonant /s/.

3. / r / was still a trill in Middle English, as it had been in Old English.

Compared with Modern English consonants, the preceding table Shows that:

1. The consonant /x/ which existed in Middle English has disappeared from Modern English.

2. Two new consonant phonemes have developed in Modern English:

/ž/ a voiced alveo-palatal fricative, whose voiceless counterpart / š / existed in Middle English.

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/ŋ/ a voiced velar nasal is now a consonant phoneme of Modern English, but was only an allophone of the phoneme /n/ in Middle English.

3. These consonant clusters which occurred at the beginnings of words in both Old English and Middle English (initial clusters) have disappeared in Modern English:

hl - hr - hn - kn - gn - wr - and wl -

Examples:

Old English		*Modern English*	
gnawe	[gnawe]	gnaw	[nɔ:]
knight	[knixt]	Knight	[nayt]
write	[wri: tə]	write	[rayt]

4. Final - ng was pronounced [-ŋg], and not [-ŋ] as in Modern English:

young	[yuŋg]	young	[yəŋ]
sing	[siŋg]	sing	[siŋ]

5. The consonant l was pronounced before the sound f, k, and m:

half	[half]	half	[ha : f]
folk	[fɔlk]	folk	[fowk]
palmer	[palmer]	palmer	[pa:mə (r)]

6. Initial th- was pronouncd [ø] (not [ɖ]), and final -s was pronounced [-s] (and not [-z]):

was	[was]	was	[wəz]

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his	[his]	his	[hiz]
houses	[hu:zes]	houses	[howzəz]
that	[øat]	that	[ðæt]

7. The suffix - cioun (-tion in Modern English) was pronounced [-siyu : n] in Middle English.

| nacioun | [nasiyu : n] | nation | [neyšən] |
| condicioun | [kɔ ndisiyu:n] | condition | [kəndišǝn] |

8. Like Old English, Middle English had geminated consonants. This meant that the same consonant may be doubled in the middle of a word:

| sonne | [sunnə] | son | [sən] |
| alle | [allə] | all | [ɔ:l] |

4. The Vowels:

The vowel phonemes of Middle English (represented mainly by Chaucer's dialect)

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e	ə	
Low		a	

Compared with Old English vowels, the vowels of Middle English showed these differences:

1. Two front vowels had disappeared from the language by the time of the Middle English period, These were the front high rounded vowel [y], and the front low (unrounded) vowel [æ].

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2. There were more complex vowels in Middle English than in Old English; most Old English complex vowels had [ə] as the second element, but in Middle English we see the development of complex vowels with [y] and [w] as the second element.

Compared with Modern English, Middle English had these distinctive features:

1. It had these long vowels, which did not have the characteristic gliding quality of Modern English complex vowels:

[i :], [e :], [a :], which may have been in free variation with [æ :], [u :], [o:], and [ɔ :].

2, Middle English had a smaller number of complex vowels than Modern English. It did not have more than six complex vowels:

/ay/ which probably alternated with /æy/.

day/dæy/ or/ day/.

/ɔy/ as in boy /bɔy/, coy/ kɔy/.

/ɔw/ as in foughten /fɔwxtən/.

/aw/ as in straunge /strawndžə/.

/ew/ as in fewe /fewə/.

/iw/ as in rude /riwdə/.

The following table presents the long and short vowels of Chaucer's dialect of Middle English

/a :/	bathed	/ba:ɖəd/
/a/	that	/øat/
/e :/	swete	/swe:tə/
/e/	wende	/wendə/
/i :/	ryde	/ri:də/
/i/	swich	/switš/
/e/	sonne	/sunnə/
/u/	ful	/ful/
/ɒ/	folk	/fɔlk/
/ɒ:/	hooly	/hɔ:li/
/o :/	route	/ro : tə/

5. Stress and Intonation:

In Middle English the strongest stress usually occurred on the first vowel of the word, so long as this vowel did not make part of the prefix.

The nature of intonation in Middle English, like that of Old English is still beyond the limits of our present knowledge of the language.

6. Phonetic Notation:

The first 18 lines of Chaucer's Prologue are given below, first in the spelling of F.N. Robinson's Chaucer's Complete Works, and then in phonetic notation:

1. Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote

   hwan ɖat a:pril wiø is šu:res so:tə.

2. The droght of March hath perced to the roote,

   ɖədruxtə ɔf martš haθ pe:rsəd to: ɖæro:to

3. And bathed every veyne in swich licour

   and ba:ðə̆ d evri væyn in swit̆š liku:r

4. Of which vertu engendered is the flour;

   ɔf hwit̆š vertyu endžendrəd is ðə flu:r

5. Whan Zephiarus eek with his sweete breeth

   hwan zefirus e:k wiθ is swe:tə bræ:θ

6. Inspired hath in every holt and heeth

   inspi:rəd haθ in evri hɔlt and hæ: θ

7. The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne

   ðə tendər krɔppəs and ðə̆yuŋgə sunnə.

8. Hath in the Ram his halva cours yronne,

   haθ in θə rǣm is halvə ku:ə rs irunn:ə.

9. And smale foweles maken melodye.

   and sma:lə fu:lə s ma: kən melɔdi : ə.

10. That sepen al the nyght wiht open ye

    dat sle:pan al ðə nixt with ɔ:pən i :ə.

11. (So priketh hem nature in hir corages),

    Sɔ:əprik θ hem natyu:r in hir kura:džə s

12. Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,

    θan lɔ:ŋgan fɔlk to: gɔ:n ɔ n pilgrima: džos

13. And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,

    and palmərs fɔr to : se : k ə n strawndž̆ə strɔ: ndə s

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14. To ferne halwes kowthe in sondry londes;

to: fernə halwəs ku :θ in sundri lɔ: ndəs

15. And specially from every shires ende.

and spesiali frəm evri ši: rəs endə.

16. Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,

ɔf eŋgələnd to: kawntərbri θæy wendə.

17. They hooly blisful martir for to seke,

θa hɔ:h blisful martir fɔr to: se:kə

18. That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke,

θat hem haθ hɔlpən hwan θat θæy wæ:r se:k ə.

## MORPHOLOGY and SYNTAX:

1. Middle English Inflections:

The inflectional system of Old English had been very much simplified by the time of Chaucer. Nearly all distinctions of case were lost in Middle English, and near the end of this period, the suffix -es took the place of the many suffixes which had indicated the genitive singular and the plural of nouns in Old English.

This loss of inflectional endings was due partly to sound change and partly analogic change (or analogy), (For a discussion of these two major factors of linguistic change, see Introductions).

The sound changes that produced this great simplification of the inflectional system of Old English in the Middle English

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period were simple but far-reaching. These sound changes were mainly three:

1. The change of Middle English m into n: Middle English m →n.

2. The loss of the final - n of the inflectional suffixes.

3. The change of Old English a, e, o, and u in inflectional sufffixes into ∂.

a ⌐
e |
   ├──→ ə
ɔ |
u ⌐
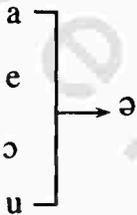
The last of these three changes, the change of [a], [e], [ɔ], and [u] to [ə], has been considered by many historical linguists as constituting the most important difference between Old English and Middle English.

This third change may be illustrated by the following examples from Old English and Middle English.

Old English		*Modern English*	
belle	[belle]	belle	[bell ə]
oxa	[ɔ ksa]	oxe	[ɔ ks ə]
nacod	[nakɔd]	naced	[na:kəd]
sunu	[sunu]	sune	[sun ə]

The three changes may be illustrated by the following:

In Old English the word lufu was a feminine noun "love" which had these cases for the singular, and three for the plural:

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Singular

Nom.	lufu
Gen.,Dat,	lufe
Acc	lufe

Plural

Now.,Ge	lufa
Acc.	lufa
Dat.	lufum

In Middle English the three forms that ended with the three vowels (-u), (-e), and (-a) became luve [luvə], without any indication of case or any differentiation between the singular and plural.

The form luum [luvum] "to the loves" underwent the three sound changes listed above:

1. The final -m of luvum was changed to -n by the end of the Old English period; so the word became luvun.

2. The word luvun lost the final-n *[luvu].

3. The final - u of luvu became an-e / - ə / luvel [luvə].

As an example of analogic change, the suffix - es in Middle English was used to indicate the genitive singular, as well as the plural of luve. Thus we have in Middle English the word luves similar to (or on the analogy of) stones, although lufu and stan had two completely different inflectional systems in Old English.

(*) is an indication that such forms were not actually found in the written materials of the period.

Nouns:

As has been seen in lufu "love", which was a feminine noun in Old English, all the other nouns had nearly lost their inflections by the end of the Middle English period.

The noun sunu "son", which was a strong masculine noun in Old English dropped most of its inflectional suffixes in Middle English, retaining only - e and - es:

		Old English	*Middle English*
Sing.	**Nom.**	sunu	sone
	Gen.	suna	sones
	Dat.	suna	sone
	Acc.	sunu	sone
plur.	**Nom.**	suna	sones
	Gen.	suna	sones
	Dat.	suna	sones
	Acc.	sunum	sones

As has been pointed out earlier, the first vowel in O.E. sunu [-u-] did not change in Middle English as regards its pronunciation, although there was a spelling change as we see in sone. The word sunu had the pronunciation [sunu], and the same word was pronounced [sunə] in Middle English. In Modern English this same vowel has become [ə], and the word is pronounced [sən] (after the loss of the final [ə]).

The suffix -es [əs] which was used in Middle English for the genitive singular and also for the plural has come to be pronounced [-z] in Modern English although is written-s for the plural sons and 's for the genitive singular son's. The noun sunu was a strong masculine noun in Old English. But not all nouns in

Old English were strong; some of the nouns were weak. Some of these weak nouns took over the plural endings -s and -es (both pronounced [-es] of the strong nouns) and some others kept the suffix -an of the weak nouns in Old English. This suffix came to be -en in Middle English, and was pronounced [-ən]. At one time [əs] and [- ən] were rival forms, especially in the South of England, but by the end of the Middle English period, the suffix [əs] was accepted as the standard sign of the plural in English nouns. Some exceptions remained in the Middle English period, and have been with us in Modern English: e.g.oxen.

The development of two O.E. nouns, ear (a weak neuter noun "ear"), and oxa (a weak mascline noun "ox") shows the extension of [-əs] to the first during the Middle English period and the preservation of [-ən] in the second. The development of these two nouns may be presented as follows:

		Old English	*Middle English*
Sing.	**Nom.**	ēare	ēre
	Gen.	ēaran	eres
	Dat.	ēaran	ere
	Acc.	ēare	ere
plur.	**Nom.**	ēaran	eres
	Acc.	ēaran	eres
	Gen.	ēaran, ēarena	eres
	Dat.	ēarum	eres
Sing.	**Nom.**	oxa	oxe
	Gen.	oxan	oxes
	Dat.	oxan	oxe
	Acc.	oxan	oxe
plur.	**Nom.**	oxan	oxen
	Acc.	oxan	oxen
	Gen.	oxan, oxena	oxen
	Dat.	oxum	oxen

Gender:

In Middle English, the language began to lose what is generally called "grammatical" gender in favour of "natural" gender. Natural gender is usually based on distinctions of sex.

The endings of Old English made it very easy to distinguish grammatical gender. The nouns had distinct forms for the different genders: stānas "stones" (masculine plural), cwēna "queens" (feminine plural), and "word" (neuter plural), for example, could be distinguished on the basis of the existence (or non-existence) of a distinctive suffix in each case. But when in Middle English, the words had the plural in -es: stones, queenes, and wordes, nothing in the word any longer indicated its gender.

2. Adjectives;

In Old English an adjective usually had the same gender as the preceding noun. Thus an adjective had three different declensions in the singular: for the masculine, the feminine, and the neuter. The word gōd "good", for example, had these distinctive forms for the accusative singular, depending on the gender of the noun that occurred with it:

	Masculine	*Feminine*	*Neuter*
Acc.	gōdne	gōde	god

But most of these suffixes were lost in Middle English. Before 1250 the form of the nominative singular of the adjective was extended to all cases of the singular, and the form of the nominative plural was used for all the other cases of the plural. This meant that "good", for example was used for all cases of

the singular in Midde English, and "goode" was the form found for all cases of the plural. This final -e of gode /- ə/ was pronounced in early Middle English. But after the beginning of th fourteenth century this final -e was no longer pronounced, although it was kept in the spelling. So the pronunciation of god, and goode in late Middle English was in both cases [go : d].

In Chaucer, we still find traces of the inflected adjective. The word yonge in Chaucer's Prologue (1.7) is an example of the weak declension of the adjective, here coming after the definite article the "the yonge sonne".

The Old English genitive plural of the adjective all appears sometimes in the form aller, alder "of all", from Old English ealra, genitive plural of eal. In the Prologue there are these two occurrences: hir aller cappe "the cap of them all", and alderbest "the best of them all" (lines 586, and 710 respectively).

The suffixes for the comparison of adjectives in Chaucer are the same as in old English: ere, and - este; but the final - e is usually not pronounced.

Some of the comparative forms of adjectives that are found in Chaucer, but are no longer used in Modern Standard English are:

badder	instead of	worse
lenger	instead of	longer

3. Pronouns:

Most of the distinctions of person, gender, number, and case that existd in the personal pronouns in Old English were retained

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in Middle English. Nearly all the distinctions that existed in Middle English still exist in Modern English. The most noticeable simplification in the system of the personal pronouns of Middle English is the absence of the dual number. The two forms for the dual: wit and yit, [wit] "we two" and [yit] "you two", did not survive beyond the third century.

The First Personal Pronoun in Old English ic existed also in Middle English, but the final consonant was lost when the pronoun was unstressed. This led to the development of the new form i [i :]. Otherwise, the First Personal pronoun preserved in Middle English nearly all the cases that it had in Old English.

The forms for the second Personal pronoun came down to Middle English with very little change from the corresponding forms in Old English: [Øu:] "thou", and [ye:] "ye" had the same pronunciation in Middle English as in Old English, although the spellings were different.

Chaucer had a lightly different form of the second personal plural pronoun yow [yu:] (Prologue lines 34, and 38).

The Third Personal pronoun in Middle English was generally the same as in Old English, with two main exceptions:

1. The pronoun she was usually to be found in the North, while the form he (or heo) was in the South.

2. The pronouns they, their, and them developed in the North; and by the end of the Middle English period they had replaced the forms that were in the South: hi, here, and hem.

The forms that we find in Chaucer are: <u>She</u>, <u>thei</u>, <u>here</u> and <u>hem</u>.

4. The Article:

The Definite Article, with its three distinct forms for the masculine sē, the feminine sēo, and the neuter đæt, was used in Old English also as a Demonstrative pronoun.

In late Middle English, the Definite article lost all inflections and had the unchanging form "the". The Demonstrative pronoun has only two forms:

đat for the singular

đo for the plural

The development of the Indefinite article is of special interest, as it was used originally in Old English as a numeral. The word <u>an</u> in Old English meant "one". By regular sound change, it came to be /ɔ:n/ in Middle English; in Chaucer it is spelt oon "one". But in late Middle English, it developed into [own], and was changed later into one [wən].

Because it was used in Middle English also as an indefinite article, it was unstressed and, this resulted in the change of the vowel to [ə]. Subsequently the final consonant (-n) was lost, and the indefinite article became a or (an) [ə] or [ən].

5. Verbs:

In Middle English, as in Old English, there are two conjugations of verbs, the strong and the weak:

Strong Verbs

O.E.	rīdan	rād	ridon	riden	"ride"
	[ri : dan]	[ra : d̦]	[rid ɔn]	[riden]	
	bindan	band	bundon	bunden	"bind"
	[bindan]	[band]	[bund ɔn]	[bunden]	
M.E.	ride (n)	rod	ride (n)	ride (n)	
	[ri: den]	[r ɔ d]	[ridən]	[ridən]	
	binde (n)	bond	bunde(n)	bunde(n)	
	[bi:nden]	[b ɑ nd]	[bu : ndən]	[bu:ndən]	

Weak Verbs

O.E.	lufian	lufode	lufod	"love"
	[luvyan]	[luvɔde]	[luvɔd]	
	fēlan	fēlde	fēled	"feel"
	[fe:lan]	[fe:lde]	[fe:led]	
M.E.	luven	luvede	luved	
	[luvən]	[luvəd]	[luvəd]	
	felan	felte	feled	
	[fe:lən]	[feltə]	[fe:ləd]	

The main changes that affected the verbs from the end of the Old English period up to the end of what we call Middle English may be summarized as follows:

1. The loss of the final - n̲ of the infinitive.

2. The change of the inflectional vowels (the unstressed vowels in the inflectional suffixes to -e [-ə].

3. The continuous decrease in the number of strong verbs, together with the necessary and natural increase in the number of weak verbs.

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Strong and weak verbs:

The Strong verbs in Middle English were small as a group in comparison with the steadily growing number of weak verbs, although the list of strong verbs included some of the most common verbs in the language. The reduction in the number of strong verbs came as a result either of the loss of some strong verbs or of the passing over of some others into the weak group. Thus the two verbs:

lēon "to lend, give", and

hnigan "to how down"

did not survive in Middle English; while

dwīnen "to melt"

became weak in Middle English, although it was strong in Old English.

It often happened that the weak and strong forms of the same verb competed for many centuries. Thus the two verbs crepe "to creep" and ryse "to rise" had two rival forms each for the past (or preterit):

	Strong Past	Weak Past
crepe	crope	crepte
ryse	ros	rysed

In Modern standard English, the past of the verb crepe, crepte, has survived, while the strong from crope is no longer used. The case of the past forms of the verb ryse is exactly the opposite: rysed is not usually used by educated speakers, while rose is the

standard form. In Modern English these two verbs are written: crept, and rose.

Similarly, the verb climb, originally a strong verb in Old English, became a weak verb in the thirteenth century, with the past (or preterit) form as climbed. But we still find in Chaucer the strong past form clomb, which has since died in Modern standard speech.

Verbs borrowed into Middle English from French were usually treated as weak verbs:

Present	Past	Past Participle
Chaunge "change"	chaungede	y-chaunged

Participles:

In Middle English, the past participle form of the verb usually had y- as a prefix. This y - comes down from the Old English prefix ge-, which preceded many Old English verbs.

The Present Participle had the suffix -and in the North, but it had -ing in the South and Midlands. Thus a verb like here(n) "to hear" had two forms for the present participle: herand, and hering. Eventually, it was the last form that has survived; and we have hearing in Modern English.

II. Derivation in Middle English:

Old English vocabulary was enlarged by a frequent use of affixes (prefixes and suffixes), and by compounding (putting together more than one element of native origin).

In Middle English both affixation and compounding were much less frequently used as methods of word formation.

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1. Affixation:

The prefixes <u>for</u>-, <u>to</u>-, and <u>with</u>-, which were very productive in Old English, were used only with very few combinations in Middle English:

for- forshake "to shake off"

   fortravail "to tire"

   The word <u>shake</u> is a native Old English word, but <u>travail</u> is taken from French. Neither of these two combinations is now used in Modern English.

to-   tobreke "to break up"

   tocleve "to split apart"

   Both of these two words have disappeared in Modern English.

with- withsay "renounce"

   withset "resist"

   The two words have fallen into disuse, and the two words that have taken their places, <u>renounce</u> and <u>resist</u>, are borrowings from Latin.

We still have in Modern English these forms with two of the preceding prefixes:

   forbid, forget, forgive, forsake, forgo, withhold, withstand, withdraw.

The Old English prefix on- (now un-) lived in Middle English, and is still used now. But starting from the Middle English period, it has had to compete with the rival prefixes like

counter-, dis-, re-, and trans-, which have come into the language from Latin.

un- unfasten

     uncover

     undo

     unfold

The first two verbs came into the language in Middle English, and the last two belong to Modern English.

The suffixes -dom, -hood, and -ship used widely in Old English for formation lost much of their use in Middle English.

-dom dukedom from the noun duke

      falsedom from the adjective false

      richdom from the adjective rich

The three words occurred in Middle English texts, but only the first has survived in Modern English.

-hood Manhood

      likelihood

These were new formations in Middle English, and have been retained in the language ever since.

- ship boldship

      kindship

      hardship

Of the three new formations in Middle English, the language has preserved only one, hardship

2. Compounding:

Compounding in Middle English was much less productive of new formations than it had been in Old English. Following are some of the few compounds that occurred in the writings of the period:

chamberlayn	"servant"
fayrhede	"beauty"
hakeneyman	"a man who hires horses"
knyght-fee	"knight's revenue"
redesman	"counsellor"

III. Middle English syntax:

Word Order:

Although the language in Middle English lost most of its inflections, word order as a structural feature of the sentence was still very flexible compared with that of Modern English. Today the usual order of a declarative statement in English is: Subject followed by Verb followed by Object.

This type of word order was also common in Middle English, but we still find other types, three of which may be illustrated from Chaucer alone:

1. I hym folwed "I followed him". (The Book of the Duchess, 397).

2. Thus taughte me my dame "Thus my mother taught me" (The Pardoner's Tale 684).

3. But hood wered he noon "but he wore no hood" (Gerneral Prologue 680).

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If the third type of word order is justified by the exigencies of the poetic craft, the first two types still may sound unusual to ears of native speakers of English today.

Verbal Constructions:

Verbal constructions in Middle English were similar to comparable constructions in Modern English, with some important differences. Some of these differences are:

1. The uses of shall and will.

2. The occasional inconsistency in the "sequence of tenses".

In early Middle English worthe was used as the future of "to be": ich wot to-night ich worthe ded "I know (that) tonight I shall be dead" (The Fox and the Wolf 191).

The word will was used to express volition, usually with the meaning "want, desire": Ne Deeth, allas! ne wol nat han my lyf "Even death, alas, refuses to take my life" (Chaucer's The Pardoner's Tale 727). We also notice here the use of the double negative, ne (no) and nat (not).

The word shall was often used when obligation was implied, and this is similar to Modern usage: y shal rise and go to my fadir (Wyclif) "I will arise and go to my father" (Luke 15.18).

An instead of the absence of the "sequence of tenses" may be seen in this line from Gower (3999):

Sche fond and gadreth herbes suote

"She found and gathers sweet herbs" (where the second verb is present, while the first is past).

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Negation:

As was seen in the preceding page, there were instances of double negative in Middle English. But even triple negatives were occasionally used in early Middle English:

ne waren naver nan martyrs swa pined (no were never not martyrs so punished). "no martyrs were ever so tortured" (The Peterborough Chronicle, 23).

Phonetic Notation:

This extract from the General Prologue of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales", given first in ordinary spelling and then in phonetic notation typifies the main morphological and syntactic features of the language during the fourteenth century: (line 118, and lines 137 - 150).

118. There was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
θæː r was alsoː ənunn əpriː əressə.

137. And sikerly she was of great desport
and sikərli šeː was ɔf græt desp ɔt

138. And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port
and ful plezaunt and amyaːbl ɔf pɔrt

139: And peyned hire to counterfete cheere
and pæːnəd hir toː kuːntrə feːtə tsě:rə

140. Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,
of kɔːrt and toː beːn estːt litš ɔ f maneːrə

141. And to ben holden digne of reverence.
and toː beːn hɔː ldən diːn ɔ f revə rensə .

142. But, for to speken of hire conscience,
but fɔr toː spæːkən fɔir kənsyensə

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143. She was so charitable and so pitous

šeː was sɔː tšaritaːbl and sɔː pituːs

144. She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous

šeː woː ldə weːp if θaǐ seː sawx əmuːs

145: Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde

Kawxt in a trapp if it wæːr dæd ɔr bledd ə

146: Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde

ɔf smalə huːndəs had šeː θat šeː fedd ə

147: With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed.

wiθ r ɑ stəd fleš or milk and wastel bræːd

148. but soore wept she if oon of hem were deed,

but sɔr weptə seː if ɔː n ɔf hem wæːr dæːd

149: Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;

ɔr if men smɔːt it wiθ ə yerd ə smert ə

150. And al was conscience and tendre herte

and al was kɔnsyens and tendər hertə

Apart from the general presentation preceding the above passage from Chaucer, these points are worthy of notice in our study of these lines from the Prologue:

A. Morphology

The inflectional suffixes that occurred with nouns and adjectives in Old English have nearly all been lost:

The noun trappe and the adjective deed (1. 145), for example, occur without inflectional suffixes. Even the final [-e] in such words as yerde [yerde] smerte [smerte], (which is a trace of the inflectional suffix that occurred with nouns and adjectives in the instrumental case in Old English), is actually there more for

metrical purpose than for the purpose of case distinctions through inflections.

2. The Old English strong verb healdan is now changed in Chaucer's time. The past participle in Old English was healden, but now it is holden: the first stressed vowel ea is now o [o], and the second vowel e is now still written e but is pronounced [∂] because it is now unstressed.

The verb wēpan, which was a strong verb in Old English, is now a weak verb having the past (or preterit) form in wepte.

3. The suffix- lich, an adjective suffix in O.E., is still found here in the adjectives estatlich (1. 140). This suffix has developed into Modern English -ly, occurring usually with adverbs.

4. The pronouns hem (1. 148) "them" represents one of the differences between dialects in Middle English. The Southern and the South Midland dialects had the form hem, while the Northern dialects had them. It is the form them that has survived in Standard speech.

B. Syntax:

1. The flexibility of word order in Chaucer's time may be seen in the position of the verb in relation to the subjunctive in some of the lines. The construction hadde she (1.146) is similar to the construction wepte (1.148), and both are different from men smoot (1. 149) and al was (1.150).

2. The Old English inflection for the genitive case (through the use of the suffix -es, for example, for many singular nouns)

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is now being superseded by the construction with the preposition of. This syntactic construction is sometimes called periphrastic genitive, since the construction is now made up of a phrase and not merely of a single word. In these fifteen lines there are eight constructions with the preposition of.

3. Either the word to or the phrase for to is used for the infinitive verb, both with nearly the same meaning: to (1.141), and for to (1.142).

4. The use of that in the extract is different from its usage in Modern English. The word that after if (1.44) would sound unnecessary today, and the relative pronoun that (1. 146) would usually come after houndes.

5. The indefinite article is found here in its present form a [ə]' but there is total absence of the definite article the.

Borrowings in Middle English Vocabulary:

A language may borrow some of its vocabulary from another language, but it rarely borrows its grammatical features. That explains why foreign influences on the vocabulary of English all through its development have been incomparably greater than its grammar.

We have seen that grammatical changes in Middle English were great. One of the contributing factors for such changes was the lack of education, which prevented the development of a literary standard language. But the borrowings into English from French during the Middle English period were so extensive that they cannot be compared with other borrowings into the language at any other period of its history.

It is true that there were other influences, besides the French, during the Middle English period. There were Latin as well as Scandinavian and Arabic borrowings in Middle English; but the number of such borrowed words seems negligible when compared with the huge number of French words that entered English during the period, especially after the Norman Conquest.

1. French Borrowings:

1. The Early Period:

The first period was that which extended between 1066 and 1250 The borrowings during these years were roughly 900 words. Most of these words were connected with the church and the upper class. Such words entered English during this early period:

noble	dame	servant	messenger
feast	story	rime	

2. The Late Period:

This was the period from 1250 to 1500; and it was the time when the English upper classes came to use French instead of English. At this stage the rate of borrowing reached its highest peak. Some of the most important borrowings are:

Government:

Govern	administer	crown
reign	royal	authority
tyrant	oppress	court
parliament	record	repeal
rebel	exile	liberty

Food

almonds	fig	date	grape
orange	lemon	cherry	peach
pastry	tart	jelly	
spice	herb	mustard	vinegar
roast	boil	fry	mince
curtain	couch	chair	cushion
screen	lamp	lantern	blanket
towel	basin		
recreation	leisure	dance	revel
fool	melody	music	chess
conversation	rein	harness	stable
scent	forest	park	

Arts and Science:

art	painting	sculpture	beauty
colour	figure	tone	cathedral
palace	chamber	ceiling	cellar
chimney	tower	porch	bay
choir	column	base	
poet	rime	prose	romance
story	chronicle	tragedy	prologue
preface	title	volume	chapter
paper	pen	study	logic
geometry	grammar	noun	clause
gender			
masculine	physician	surgeon	pain
plague	anatomy	stomach	pulse
remedy	balm	poison	

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The preceding lists serve to illustrate how a huge number of French words was borrowed into English during the Middle English period, and how extensive these borrowings were. But these were not all the borrowings during this period. Examples of other borrowings from French mainly during the early Middle English period, are given in the following lists, which are divided into three main categories: nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

Nouns:

action	age	air	bucket
business	city	coast	comfort
country	courage	damage	debt
deceit	dozen	ease	envy
error	face	fame	flower
force	grain	grief	honour
hour	jest	joy	labour
manner	marriage	metal	mountain
noise	number	ocean	odour
opinion	order	pair	people
peril	person	piece	point
powder	power	rage	reason
river	seal	season	sign
sound	spirit	square	sum
tailor	task	unity	use
vision	waste		

Adjectives:

able	active	calm	certain
clear	common	curious	double

easy	fierce	final	firm
foreign	gentle	honest	innocent
natural	nice	obedient	original
perfect	poor	principal	proper
probable	pure	real	second
secret	simple	special	sure
strange	tender	universal	usual

Verbs:

advise	aim	allow	apply	arrange
arrive	carry	change	chase	close
consider	continue	count	cover	cry
deceive	declare	defeat	delay	desire
destroy	endure	enjoy	enter	form
join	grant	increase	inform	inquire
furnish	marry	mount	move	oblige
observe	pass	pay	please	practise
praise	prove	pursue	push	receive
refuse	relieve	remember	reply	satisfy
save	succeed	suppose	trace	travel
tremble	trip	wait		

It is not always easy to assign an exact date for each borrowed word. The approximate date of borrwing is still possible, however, in many cases, the phonetic factor being usually the most reliable means for fixing such dates. The phonetic factor involves the study of the phonetic shapes of words and the changes that occur to them. The phonetic changes on which we base our conclusions about the approximate dates for words

borrowed from French into English during the Middle English period are these:

1. The Consonants:

The two English words <u>hotel</u> and <u>hostel</u> came into English from French, but not at the same time. The first word "hotel" came later than the word "hostel". This is known through the difference between the medial (middle) consonants in the two words: the word hotel has only one medial consonant [-t-], but the word hostel has two medial consonants (a medial cluster) [-st-]. This cluster existed in French during the Old and Middle French periods: it was during the Middle French period that the word "hostel" was taken into Middle English, where it has kept this medial cluster [-st-] until the present day.

But the consonant [-s-] before [t-] has been lost in Modern French, as we have in the word hotel. Since the word hotel is also a borrowing from French, it must have entered English at a later time than the word <u>hostel</u>.

Similarly, the difference between the consonant [š] and the two consonants [tš] at the beginning of a word (initially) is enough to indicate that the word <u>chef</u> came into Enlish from French after the word chief had entered the language. The word chief came into the language from French during the Middle English period, when the French language still kept the pronunciation of ch- as [tš]. This pronunciation has been lost to Modern French as [šef] (and not [tšef]). There has been no similar change in Modern English; but from the phonetic

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development of French, the word chef is a more modern introduction into English than chief.

The third example of consonant change in French on the basis of which we can decide the date of borrowing, may be seen in comparing the two words rouge, judge which are pronounced [ru wž] and [dž udž] in Modern English; and both have been borrowed from French. Because the sound [dž] existed only in Middle French, and has been substituted by [ž] in Modern French, we can conclude that the word judge was borrowed into English during the Middle English period and rouge has been taken into the language only recently.

These consonant differences upon which we base the dates of borrowing may be presented as follows:

Middle English Borrowings			*Modern English Borrowings*		
Example	**Ph. Tr.**	**Cons.**	**Example**	**Ph. Tr.**	**Cons.**
hostel	[hɔstl]	-st-	hotel	[hotel]	-t-
chief	[tšiyf]	tš	chef	[šef]	š-
judge	[džɔdž]	dž-	rouge	[ruwž]	-ž

Using the consonants as a guide for indicating the approximate dates of borrowing, we have found that the change in this case occurred to the French consonants, but the case is different with the vowels. It is the English vowels that have changed from Middle English to the present day, while the French vowels have remained relatively stable.

The two words fine and machine have been taken from French, the first during the Middle English period, and the other

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only recently. The vowel in the first word is [-ay-], and the second vowel in the second word is [iy]; and it was during the early Modern English period that the English long vowel [i:] has changed into [ay]. So, the word fine which has suffered the change of [i:] into [ay] must have entered the language earlier than the word machine which has not suffered such change.

In the same way, the two words tour [tuə r] and tower [tawə r] come from French; but the first word came into English later than the word tower. Like the word machine, the word tour does not show the same type of vowel change that the words fine and tower present. In the case of the word tower , we find that the vowel [aw] was [u:] in Middle English, and changed into [aw] only in Early Modern English. But the word tour has not suffered such a change, because it came into English in the Modern period.

A third example of the importance of vowel change for fixing an approximate date of borrowing is found in the two words case and fracas, "uproar, noise". The last part of the word fracas (-cas) [-ka:] has the same vowel [-a:] as the word case had in Middle French. In Middle English the word case [ka:sə:] had the same vowel [a:] that the word fracas has as a final vowel in preesent-day English. In early Modern English the vowel [a:] in case changed into Modern English [ey], and the word case is now pronounced [keys].

The difference between [a:] in fracas and [ey] in case is taken as a proof that the word case came into English during the

Middle English period, while the word fracas is a recent borrowing from French.

The three instances of vowel change from Middle English to Modern English may be presented in table form:

Middle English Borrowings			Modern English Borrowings		
Example	Ph.Tr.	Vowel	Example	Ph.Tr.	Vowel
fine	[fayn]	[-ay]	machine	[mešiyn]	[-iy-]
tower	[tawə r]	[-aw-]	tour	[tuər]	[-uə-]
case	[keys]	[-ey-]	fracas	[fræka:]	[-a:]

These types of vowel change from middle to Modern English have been called "The Great Vowel Shift" ; and it will be dealt with at more length in the following chapter (Chapter 8).

Many of the verbs that were borrowed from French into English during that period were taken in the plural form of the present, as may be seen from the verb receive in Modern English. The from receive is clearly more a reflex (a descendant) of the French verb form recevez (in Vouz recevez "you receive") than of the verb form reçoit (in Il reçoit "He receives").

Doublets:

It sometimes happened that a word was taken twice from French into Middle English. This has resulted in the existence of two words in Modern English with some difference in form, but which originally had the same meaning. These two words are usually called doublets. In time, however, the identity of meaning also disappeared; and we have two words of related form and meaning.

The words catch and chase may be called doublets. They were taken into Middle English from French, but each was taken from a different dialect of Middle French. The first was taken from what was called Norman French, and the second from Central French. The differences in form between the two words are clear: the first is [kætš], and the second is [tšeys]. They have also come to be differentiated in meaning, the first being "stop by getting hold of, discover or find a person doing something" and the second signifying "run after to capture or kill, drive away".

Another doublet taken into Middle English from two different dialects of French may be seen in the two words reward and regard. The consonantal difference between the two words is limited to the difference between [-w-] and [-g-]; but there is also a meaning distinction between "to give in return - reward", and "to consider - regard".

Hybrids:

French words that came into Middle English took on the native affixes (the prefixes and suffixes that had come down from Old English). Thus a hybrid is a word made up of two or more elements, one of which is borrowed from another language. A word like nobler or noblest may be called a hybrid, because it is made up of noble borrowed from French into Middle English, and the native suffix -er or -est that had been in the language ever since the old English period.

Other hybrids that own their existence to borrowings from French during the Middle English period are:

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faithful, faith (from French) -ful (from Old English) justly, just (from French) -ly (from Old English) gentleman, gentle (from French) -man (from Old English).

II. Latin Borrowings:

Latin borrowings came into the language during the late Middle English period. Compared with borrowings from French, these borrowings were generally of a learned character as they came from Latin into the written language.

The following list presents examples of Latin borrowings into Middle English:

Conspiracy	contempt	distract	history
Include	infancy	individual	infinite
Intellect	legal	moderate	necessary
Popular	private	rational	submit
Genius	inferior	index	picture
Polite	quiet	summary	incredible
Spacious			

Triplets:

The result of French borrowings in Midldle English was the existence of doublets: two words with related forms and related meanings. The borrowings from Latin added a new dimension. We no longer have only two words with related forms and meanings; we now have examples of three words with related meanings. These we may call triplets. Such triplets do not have exactly the same meanings, but each of the three words is used

in a context where the two others are not. Such triplets may be represented by the follwing examples:

From Old English	From French	From Latin
rise	**mount**	**asscend**
"get up"	"get up"	"climb"
fast	**fast**	**secure**
"firmly fixed"	"solid"	"safe"
time	**time**	**epoch**
"days past, present, and future"	"time a person lives"	"time of impor- tant events"